

**Welcome Remarks
Ambassador D. Brent Hardt
Native American JJ Kent Visits Guyana – Umana Yana
July 26, 2012
Georgetown, Guyana**

Honorable Pauline Campbell-Sukhai, Minister of Amerindian Affairs;
Ms. Jennifer Wishart, Director of the Walter Roth Museum;
distinguished guests, ladies and gentleman

On behalf of the United States Embassy in Georgetown, Guyana, we are thrilled to have with us this morning a very special guest, Mr. JJ Kent, who is a Lakota Native American and honors us with his presence here in Guyana. Mr. Kent has been traveling throughout Guyana during his weeklong sojourn, meeting with community leaders, and visiting Amerindian villages in Surama and St. Cuthbert's, where he is sharing his experiences, as well as his culture, customs, and the challenges he has encountered as a Native American. In the process, Mr. Kent has also been able to gain insights and understanding of the Amerindian community in Guyana. Mr. Kent's visit to Guyana offers what we

believe is a distinctive, multi-dimensional cultural exchange between our countries, which have both been enriched by our Native American peoples and which both face the challenge of preserving these great cultural traditions as part of our colorful national mosaics.

The United States is proud of our Native American history and culture. While we recognize there has been a painful past and a present that is still fraught with challenges, the vibrant heritage of Native Americans and Alaskan Indians are an integral part of the fabric of U.S. history and culture. From the cultural traditions to the artistic and craft talent, to the soothing sounds of the Indian flute which we will hear today; from medicinal and agricultural contributions, to the importance of the family unit; and, most notably, to the connection to the land and spirit of conservation it is clear that Native Americans represent and reflect the spirit and heart of the Americas.

Since his first day in office, President Obama has worked to strengthen government-to-government relations between the United States and tribal governments to improve the quality of life for all American Indians and Alaska Natives. Recognizing that the best policies for Indian Country come from Indian Country, the Administration has engaged tribal leaders by hosting White House Tribal Leaders Conferences and ordering agencies to create detailed consultation policies. President Obama himself observed: “I believe that one day; we’re going to be able to look back on these years and say that this was a turning point. This was the moment when we began to build a strong middle class in Indian Country; the moment when businesses, large and small, began opening up in reservations; the moment when we stopped repeating the mistakes of the past, and began building a better future together, one that honors old traditions and welcomes every Native American into the American Dream.”

Throughout his Presidency, President Obama and his Administration have been committed to working with tribal leaders to develop and implement policies to achieve a better future for tribal governments and the people they serve. This record of support includes:

- Improving Health Care for Native Americans and Alaska Natives, by expanding programs and services available for those who use the Indian Health Service, which includes approximately two million American Indians and Alaska Natives.
- Promoting Sustainable Economic Development in Indian Country through the Recovery Act, which provides more than \$3 billion to help tribal communities renovate schools on reservations, spur job creation in tribal economies, improve housing and energy efficiency, and support health facilities and policing services.
- Making Tribal Communities Safer: The President signed the Tribal Law and Order Act into law in July 2010, which gives tribes greater sentencing authority; improves defendants' rights; establishes new guidelines and training for officers handling

domestic violence and sex crimes; strengthen services to victims; helps combat alcohol and drug abuse; and helps at-risk youth.

- Resolving longstanding disputes such as longstanding Native American Legal claims.
- Addressing Indigenous issues and announcing U.S. support for the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People.

It is clear that we value our relationship with the Native American community and we look forward to continued efforts to deepen it.

Like the United States, Guyana has a rich Indigenous heritage. I know there are nine Amerindian tribes settled across the ten regions of Guyana, adding to the incredible diversity of the six peoples that inhabit Guyana. The Wai Wais are skilled architects and were responsible for the construction of the wonderful space we are in right now – the Umana Yana. The Macushis, the Patomonas, the Arawaks, the Caribs, the Wapishana, the Arecunas, the Akawaios, and last but not least, the Warraus.

The Guyana government has also made significant strides to demonstrate solidarity with the Amerindian Community. Article 149G of the Constitution of Guyana guarantees the protection of Indigenous languages and cultural heritage. The Amerindian Act of 2006 aims to protect and enforce the rights to land and internal self-government. The month of September is celebrated as Amerindian Heritage Month to build awareness of the rich culture of the first peoples of Guyana.

Today's program reflects what has been a rapidly blooming relationship to foster more diverse cultural exchanges between the United States and Guyana. Back in May of this year, the U.S. Embassy supported a joint performance involving the Keen Dance Theater of New York and the Classique Dance Company of Guyana. We brought together artwork from U.S. and Guyanese artists at our Art in Embassies reception in June. This July, we celebrated American culture at our Fourth of July reception – where we featured food, drinks, and spirited music from the United States. Yesterday evening, we hosted Guyanese-

American pianist Dr. Ray Luck at a recital at our residence. Next week, the U.S. Embassy will proudly display a booth as part of the Emancipation Day festivities, to highlight African-American culture, leadership, and achievement. We are also looking forward to supporting the musical arts at the upcoming Music Enrichment Workshop that the Woodside Choir is hosting very soon – and we are currently exploring the possibility of bringing a jazz artist to Guyana later this year. As you can see, we have a rich repertoire for cultural activities – and we are seeking new opportunities to promote various aspects of U.S. culture and heritage and to build links to Guyana.

On behalf of the U.S. Embassy, I would like to thank the Walter Roth Museum, the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport Affairs, and the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs for their remarkable support in making JJ Kent's visit to Guyana a productive one. I hope you enjoy today's educational and musical performance, and that each one of you will come away this morning with new insights into our common cultural heritage.

Thank you.